

## What happens to early childhood memories?

When I try to recall my life before my fifth birthday, I can summon only glimmers—these match strikes in the dark. Yet I know I must have thought and felt and learned so much. Where did all those years go?

Psychologists have named this dramatic forgetting “childhood amnesia.” On average, people’s memories stretch no farther than age three and a half. Everything before then is a dark abyss. “This is a phenomenon of longstanding focus,” says Patricia Bauer of Emory University, a leading expert on memory development. “It demands our attention because it’s a paradox: Very young children show evidence of memory for events in their lives, yet as adults we have relatively few of these memories.”

In the last few years, scientists have finally started to unravel precisely what is happening in the brain around the time that we forsake recollection of our earliest years.

“What we are adding to the story now is the biological basis,” says Paul Frankland, a neuroscientist at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. This new science suggests that as a necessary part of the passage into adulthood, the brain must let go of much of our childhood.

**Read the full, original story: [This is where your childhood memories went](#)**